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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT ABBAS'S UPCOMING VISIT TO TURKEY

¶1. (C) Summary: The Turkish MFA depicts the upcoming April 23-24 visit of Palestinian President Abbas as a way for the GOT to help solidify Abbas's position in a crucial period. The GOT plans to continue aid to Palestinians through Abbas, not the HAMAS government. End Summary.

An Attempt to "Solidify" Abbas's Position

¶2. (C) According to MFA Middle East Department Head Sedat Onal, Abbas is set to arrive late on April 23 and spend the 24th meeting with President Sezer (his official host), FM Gul, PM Erdogan, Turkish Union of Chambers President Rifat Hisarciklioglu, and main opposition Republican People's Party chairman Baykal. Onal said the request for the visit came from Abbas, when he pulled PM Erdogan aside at the March 28-29 Arab League Summit.

¶3. (C) Onal emphasized the visit will be a working visit, not a state visit, thus avoiding some pomp, circumstance and ceremony. Contrary to media reports, the MFA does not envisage any signings or new initiatives during the visit.

¶4. (C) Onal said the purpose of the visit is to show support for Abbas, the only viable Palestinian political figure who can maintain communication with the world. Onal noted that Abbas is in a crucial period now, in the wake of the HAMAS election victory, and the GOT wants to "solidify" his position during this transitional time. They also will seek his insights into his relationship with the new HAMAS government and parliament.

¶5. (C) Israeli First Secretary told us the Israeli Embassy here worries that the Abbas visit to Ankara may prompt an invitation to President Sezer for a visit to the Palestinian territories -- including meetings with HAMAS figures in the new government. The prickly, protocol-conscious Sezer could well choose to accept before his term of office expires in May 2007; Sezer's stated reason for traveling to Damascus to visit Bashar Assad in 2005 was that he was obligated to return Assad's earlier visit to Turkey.

Turkish Aid Will Go Through Abbas, not HAMAS

¶6. (C) Vehbi Dincerler, the MFA's Coordinator for Economic, Social and Humanitarian Affairs for Palestine, told us Turkish aid will go through Abbas, not HAMAS. Turkey has allocated another USD 1 million for aid to Palestinians, in the wake of the same amount in 2004-2005. Like past Turkish aid to Palestinians, this new tranche will consist of goods, not cash -- food, hospital supplies, and computer equipment.

¶7. (C) In years past, goods for Palestinians have been purchased in Turkey and shipped through Jordan with Israeli permission; Dincerler foresees the same procedures for the new aid. On the receiving end, as in the past, he foresees the Red Crescent delivering aid directly to needy families,

or taking it to storage facilities designated by Abbas.
Turkish diplomats from the Ramallah consulate will monitor
the destinations and end use.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

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